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ABSTRACT

In spring 1984, Riverside Community College (RCC) initiated a strategic planning process designed to draw a larger proportion of the college community into institutional planning. In the first meetings of the President's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (PSPAC), 58 faculty, managers and support staff gathered to address questions concerning the college's mission, goals, and programs. The Committee met each Friday afternoon to discuss case studies of successful and unsuccessful businesses. The presentations made by the college president and other members of the committee served as exemplars of good teaching. Between the large group meetings, smaller groups met to review the discussion questions on the week's case study or current topic. The discussion groups were expected to look at ideas from every possible angle, but not to produce any product; instead, action groups made up of representatives of the discussion groups were formed to come up with such products as a list of the five things the college does best, or needs to do. Despite early resistance to the adoption of a business mentality, gradually newly learned business and marketing principles were applied to the college. The final outcome of the first PSPAC meetings was a series of statements about RCC's "business," vision, and values. Since 1984, there have been other PSPAC's to address other concerns. Though not all outcomes have been positive, the potential rewards of the process far outweigh the risks. (AJL)

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RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Riverside, California

ENERGIZING AN INSTITUTION FOR EXCELLENCE

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May, 1988

JC 890 045

ENERGIZING AN INSTITUTION FOR EXCELLENCE

In the summer of 1983, our Superintendent/President, Dr. Charles (Chuck) Kane attended a month-long seminar offered by Harvard University's Institute for Educational Management. He was excited about the people he met, Harvard's case study method of teaching, and some of the group dynamics practiced there. Prior to the Harvard experience, most of Riverside Community College's planning had been done by the President and his cabinet. If five or six people can plan the future of a college, wouldn't ten times that many create a better product? Too many cooks cause the quiche to turn queasy, you say? Or are numerous noggins niftier than two? President Kane decided to find out.

In the spring of 1984, the President's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee, PSPAC, (pronounced pizz-pack) was born. Fifty eight faculty, managers and support staff gathered together to try to answer such questions as, "Who are we? What's our purpose? Why do we exist? What do we do well? What is our business?"

PROCESS

To help the group discover the importance of planning, the committee met each Friday afternoon (yes, Friday afternoon!) to discuss case studies of successful and unsuccessful businesses. We read John Naisbitt's Megatrends, George Keller's Academic Strategy and a history of our college, written by two of our professors, Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez.

Chuck Kane was the "teacher of record" at the Friday meetings. He is an excellent teacher. Each of his presentations included different audio/visual media: videotape, overhead transparencies, blackboard, sound/slide or flip charts. Other presenters were expected to follow suit, and most sessions were exemplars of good teaching.

The President usually opened the Friday meetings with, "Name one good thing." This created a positive, healthy, upbeat atmosphere. There were some surprising reports, things about which most people wouldn't have known. The "good thing" accounts often brought spontaneous applause and encouragement. There was also lots of humor, with the President often laughing at himself. Through the process, new, hidden talent appeared, frequently from surprising sources.

Between the large group meetings on Fridays, smaller groups of 9 or 10, which we called CAN Groups (named for a can do attitude, not the location of the meeting), met for an hour to mull over the discussion questions on the week's case study or current topic. Each CAN Group had a CAN Leader, and the CAN Leaders met with the President on Thursday afternoons as his CAN Group. The CAN Leaders informed the President about how things were going in each of the groups. What was said, rather than who said it, was stressed. Individual's names were not to be used. Of course, not everything went smoothly; some CAN leaders were having a tough time with a few individuals in their groups, so other leaders pitched in with suggestions to alleviate tensions and avoid potential problems. However, this was the case in only a few instances.

It was our original intention to change the personnel and leadership of the CAN groups about every four weeks. When we brought it up with the leaders, they all

said, "No way!" Their groups were just beginning to jell and they didn't want to repeat the initial adjustment period again. Gradually, an extremely strong spirit of trust and camaraderie had quietly developed among the members of each CAN group, including the President's.

While the CAN groups were expected to discuss and look at ideas from every possible angle (we called it "looking at the fish" from an article which described 19th century Harvard professor Louis Agassiz's habit of making his students study a dead fish by the hour, day and week), they were not expected to produce any product. To produce a product, we developed "Action Groups." Action Groups were made up of representatives from each of the six CAN Groups. They operated on Friday afternoons and had to work within very limited and rigid time limits. While philosophical discussions were held in the CAN groups, Action Groups were to come up quickly with something of substance and be able to explain and defend it. For example, they could be assigned to rank the top five things the college does best (out of a list of about 100 developed by the large group), or list three of the most important things we must do to become a quality college (again from a long list).

Some participants didn't like comparing themselves and our college with businesses. They felt a business mentality was hostile to academe. "We're <u>not</u> a business!" they exclaimed. But after Proposition 13, many community colleges in California found out that indeed they were businesses and not very good ones! Some went into deficit spending or had to be bailed out with loans from the state and then monitored for years until their books balanced.

The complaints became less frequent when we got into our <u>own</u> business. Gradually, and in a few cases, reluctantly, some newly-learned business and marketing principles were applied to RCC. We brought in former faculty members who had taught in the '20s, '30s and '40s, and they shared stories of what this college was like in its early years. We invited some community leaders who had done informal surveys of what the "man on the street" thought of our college. We had graduating high school seniors tell the group why they would <u>not</u> be attending RCC, and what made another college or university more attractive. Another group of our own students told us why they had selected RCC over other possibilities. Some of the things we were told were not flattering, but we needed to hear them.

The college had gone through its ten-year regional accreditation the preceding year (1983). Most of us were weary of writing mission statements and goals and objectives. However, when the President badgered us, week after week, "What business are we in?" the group decided that a one sentence statement about our business would be far more effective than a paragraph on our mission.

Once we decided what business we were in, we started talking about values. One of the intriguing discussion questions about the three businesses we studied was, "What does this company value?" One seemed to have profit as its primary value; one valued quality and the other, service. What were Riverside Community College's values? Not surprisingly, the committee discovered that everyone wanted to do a good job. Groundsmen wanted the lawns to be green, mowed and trimmed, with neat shrubbery and fresh, colorful flowers grown in season.

Faculty members wanted to be excellent teachers, lucid and able to get their subjects across in an interesting, stimulating manner. Secretaries wanted to turn out work efficiently and respond to telephone calls before the third ring. Eventually, everyone realized that students were the fulcrum around which the institution revolved. Student centeredness became our first value. We originally came up with seven values and grudgingly whittled them down to four.

Finally, we asked ourselves about our vision. What did we want to be in 1995? Did we want to become the best community college in Riverside County? Certainly, but there are only a total of four, and we may already be the best! How about the best in Southern California? Absolutely! What about the entire state--there are some pretty good colleges among the 106? Yes! And if we became the best in California, why not the entire country, or for that matter, the world? Well gosh, gee whiz, why not go for it?!

Eventually, the Action Groups had to come up with statements about our business, vision and values. While developing one of our values, Student Centeredness, the Action Groups were asked to complete the sentence: "To achieve student centeredness, we will....."

As the weeks went by, people began to know each other, and talk! They called each other by their first names. The realization gradually began to dawn on them that they indeed might have some say about the destiny of their institution. There was a changed attitude. It seemed to come about gradually--toward their job, toward each other, toward Chuck Kane, toward the entire teaching profession. They developed an understanding of the importance and interdependence of each job on campus.

The following simple statements are not the product of a public relations firm. They have been hacked out step by step with hours of thought and discussion behind each word. A PR-type might have come up with the same thing, but there would not have been the buy-in that we had. There was a kind of euphoria that gripped that first group. We were giant killers. There was nothing that we couldn't do if we put our minds to it and worked together! We had a vision, we knew what our business was, and our four values would keep us on track!

OUR BUSINESS, VISION AND VALUES

Our Business

Riverside Community College is a vital, affordable, personalized, public institution of higher education which provides quality teaching and accessibility to a diverse student population.

Our Vision

We will be the leader among community colleges, highly regarded for our commitment to students, respected for excellence in teaching and recognized as responsive to the communities we serve.
We will realize our vision by making: "A Commitment to Learning"

Our Values

STUDENT CENTEREDNESS: To achieve Student Centeredness, we will:
-- Serve the best educational interests of the students,

-- Offer a comprehensive and flexible curriculum together with programs and services according to diverse and evolving student needs,
-- Treat each student with a sincere, caring attitude and respond to suggestions and constructive criticism from students,
-- Counsel and advise students to help them plan for and progress toward their individual educational goals, and
-- Recognize outstanding student performance.

TEACHING EXCELLENCE: To achieve Excellence in Teaching, we will:
-- Communicate to students a body of knowledge in a creative, stimulating and challenging manner,
-- Work to establish student and instructor rapport,
-- Maintain the highest standard of professional performance and recognize teaching excellence,
-- Promote the exchange of ideas among colleagues and provide opportunities for professional development,
-- Clearly define for students course goals, objectives and grading standards, making clear the expectation of high achievement,
-- Encourage students to think critically and analytically, applying learned principles, concepts and skills, and
-- Inspire independence of thought and self-discipline.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: To achieve an Environment Conducive to Learning, we will:
-- Create an atmosphere in which students and staff find satisfaction in their work and feel pride in achievement,
-- Provide comfortable, functional and aesthetically pleasing facilities and grounds,
-- Provide and maintain state-of-the-art equipment and ample supplies,
-- Provide programs and support services which are responsive to student and community needs, and
-- Actively support social and academic activities which take place outside of the classroom.

TRADITION: To achieve a sense of our Traditions, we will:
-- Further the traditions of pride, quality, innovation and professionalism found in this institution,
-- Share our heritage by making Riverside Community College the educational and cultural center of the community, and
-- Build for the future on the foundations of our past.

Since PSPAC I, there have been other PSPACs. The second PSPAC participants (spring, 1985) were nominated by members from the first PSPAC. There were more faculty, and they were younger; there were fewer managers and more classified staff. PSPAC II largely retraced the steps of PSPAC I and reconfirmed, with a few modifications, the statements about our business, vision and values. Much of PSPAC III's membership was through self-selection. Faculty members were given five choices to serve on 36 college-wide committees, one of which was PSPAC III. Students were included for the first time. Because we're in one of the fastest growing areas in the United States, we are planning some new centers in our outlying areas. PSPAC III developed an outline of an organizational structure that will most effectively meet the needs of this district when the centers are in place.

We held PSPAC IV during five consecutive afternoons (1-6 p.m.) in July of 1986. Its membership was largely made up of faculty who could not attend the Friday afternoon sessions during the Fall and Spring Semesters because they were responsible for performing groups in music, theater and athletics. Not surprisingly, their interests primarily focused on strategies for effective recruitment. A smaller group worked on ways to improve faculty/management relations.

PSPAC V members (spring, 1987) were both nominated by former PSPACers and self-selected. Recent PSPACs have visited other colleges and met with their peers and the college's leaders. A series of questions was developed and sent in advance. Each CAN group visited a different college and then reported back to the large group. The members felt this was a most worthwhile experience and they picked up a number of suggestions and ideas from these colleges.

PSPAC VI is just winding up and has a large number of new faculty, with increases in both classified staff and students. Including all new, full-time faculty on PSPAC has served as a very effective orientation. To date, about 300 different individuals have participated in PSPAC.

Were all of the outcomes positive? No. As mentioned before, there was some resistance to applying business principles to an educational enterprise. Some felt it took too much time away from their primary job. Reading assignments were heavy. The teacher's union polled the full-time faculty, including members who had never been participants (about one-fourth of the faculty), for their opinions about PSPAC.

For those invited to serve on the first PSPAC the response was, "Why me?" For those not selected, it was, "Why not me?" It has always been a problem to get "buy-in" from those who have not been participants. That group has been the most critical of PSPAC. Another problem has been to keep former PSPACers involved and informed about current plans. Once or twice a year all PSPACers, both current and former, come together to help plan the college objectives for the succeeding year. At those gatherings, there is an air of excitement as people renew relationships and work toward a common goal. Normally, progress reports on current objectives are given, and the current PSPAC has already identified a preliminary list of things we should consider for next year's objectives.

There also has been a subtle, seldom-expressed power struggle between PSPAC, some members of the Academic Senate and the teacher's union. Which one has more of the President's ear and which one has the most clout to get its recommendations implemented? Since PSPAC is a creation of the President, most of the concerns have come from union leadership. In the past couple of years, there have been attempts at union decertification and heated contests over the union's leadership, with some claims being made that the labor strife was induced by the PSPAC experience.

Nevertheless, for the large majority of those who took part (especially those who fully participated), the experience has been overwhelmingly rewarding.

OUTCOMES

Without a doubt, our four values have had the strongest effect on all of us. They determine what we do and don't do on a daily basis. If a proposal is made and doesn't fit under one of the values, we won't do it. Our values set the parameters within which the college operates and plans for the future. Here are just a few of some other PSPAC outcomes (listed under our four values):

Student Centeredness

-- Our class schedules and other publications no longer have pictures of buildings on their covers. The pictures (in color) are of students and faculty working together illustrating each of our four values.

-- When there was low participation in a student election, the student government was shut down. Media coverage was heavy and largely negative. Gradually, a group of students got together and drew up a new constitution, held a new election and demonstrated a rejuvenated student government/activities program.

-- As a result of some hard work done by a PSPAC member who wanted to increase her effectiveness with students who were undecided about their career plans, we became (at the time) the only college west of the Mississippi with a new computerized guidance program known as SIGI Plus.

-- Some individuals noted that most of our scholarship money was going to students who transferred. Working with the University of California at Riverside, they developed a plan to keep some of the scholarship money in our own community. Recipients (called "Riverside Scholars") spend their first two years at RCC and their last two at UC, Riverside.

-- For a number of years, we had relinquished to the University of California and the California State University the responsibility for educating the top students coming out of high school. No longer. We decided to compete aggressively for the better students because we are convinced that we can do a better and less expensive job teaching the brightest and best. Even though it is one of our most important functions, we are no longer just an institution of the "second chance" and second or third choice.

Teaching Excellence

-- Faculty members were encouraged to use media in their class presentations. Through Dr. Kane's constant use in PSPAC, many faculty became accustomed to its use and now feel comfortable using media on a regular basis. We hired a media specialist who works with individual faculty members to augment student learning through effective use of media.

-- As a result of mixing disciplines within CAN groups, members grew to recognize the expertise of faculty in other areas. Some began to invite members from other departments to lecture to their classes on pertinent topics. The educational program has been greatly enhanced by this cross-fertilization of fields of expertise.

-- We had a faculty exchange with a college in England. The visiting faculty member served on PSPAC and regarded it as one of the best experiences in his teaching career. He said he knew more people in one year through PSPAC than he had met at his own college in four years of teaching there.

Learning Environment

-- PSPAC identified the need to upgrade the condition of all classrooms. During the summer of 1984, an ad hoc faculty committee drew up a list of 24 things an ideal classroom should have. One of the most visible outcomes of PSPAC has been the renovation of the classrooms in our quadrangle.

The quadrangle, with a beautiful inner court and ivy on its outside walls, was the second structure in the state built exclusively for junior college use. The trouble was that the ivy was also on the inside walls, which were dirty and painted a dull institutional cream color. Broken pencil sharpeners, broken floor tiles and clocks that hadn't worked for years, to say nothing of inoperable climate control, were the norm. To replace the faded wall colors, one of our art instructors in PSPAC with a background in the psychology of colors, selected a variety of pastels that were conducive to learning. When the faculty walked into their quad classrooms that fall, they had what they wanted--new carpeting, new lighting, fresh paint, staplers, pencil sharpeners, clocks with the correct time and air-conditioning that worked!

-- The groundskeepers who were members of PSPAC took new pride in their work and extensive landscaping has been completed in recent years. Although our college is over 70 years old, the grounds are beautiful, and they reflect the care and attention the staff is giving to their job.

Tradition

-- As a result of valuing tradition, we reinstated Convocation. This is a college-wide activity which takes place during the opening of the Fall Semester. Faculty members, in full academic regalia, lead their students to the quadrangle lawn where there is some pomp and circumstance with a distinguished speaker giving a scholarly address on a topic of academic interest.

-- The former women's gymnasium was renamed for a faculty member who was responsible for the development of women's athletics at RCC. Naturally, both men and women use the facility today.

-- We dedicated a large forum, in which we put all the latest state-of-the-art instructional media, to a former history instructor/registrar/vice-president at RCC. He joined us on his 93rd birthday for the dedication of the classroom.

There were many other outcomes from PSPAC. Most of them can be found in the evaluations we conduct after each final session. New instructors reported that

it gave them a sense of community and identity with the college. It was an opportunity to meet people and a forum for discussion. The accessibility of the President was mentioned by many, along with the realization that he is very supportive of people and projects on the campus that focus on improving students' learning. The list of committed individuals who have moved our institution forward as a result of the PSPAC experience is growing.

There have been other college presidents (e.g. Los Angles Pierce under President Herbert Ravetch and Ventura College under President Robert Long) who have led large groups of their staffs through a similar process. Before they started, we warned them of the risks to which they were exposing themselves. It takes a strong president to be able to stand up in front of 60 people and face, at times, rather direct criticism. However, the group eventually learns that it is OK to criticize if the criticism will help the institution do a better job with its students, faculty and staff. Both Pierce's and Ventura's outcomes were similar to ours. We all feel that the potential rewards far outweigh the risks for energizing an institution toward excellence.

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The following list includes books that were used by one or more of the six PSPAC groups. Some were read by all members, others by a few and then reported to the committee in the form of book reviews. In addition, case studies, current articles from periodicals and newspapers, small pamphlets and leaflets were used on a continual basis.

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